



## LOBANA SIKH COMMUNITY OF JAMMU & KASHMIR : A SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDY

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### Lobana Community: A brief introduction

The people of India live in tribes and different communities or social groups. Different professions are divided among different communities. Sohinder Singh Banjara Bedi writes in regard to community or Biradari: “All those people who link their ancestry with some common elder one fall into the same community. Every community is such a social group who has the same rituals and way of life. People of many communities have been living in India from the very beginning, including those of Lobana community. They have their own social organization, cultural traditions and their own special dialect. This community has been living in India right from the ancient times. Lobana is a South Asian race, the members of which have been traditionally engaged in transport business but now they have become farmers and land owners. In the Punjab region, most of the Lobanas are Sikhs but very few of them are Hindus and Muslims also. The Lobanas link their ancestry to Surayavanshi and Chandravanshi Kashatrias and Rajputs and they owe their origin to them. Most of the words of their Lobana dialect resemble the language of the Western Rajputs. According to historians, the members of this community are Aryans. They are found among the Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and many other religions. Even before the partition of the country these people had settled in many parts of the country, like Lahore, Sheikhpura, Gujranwala, Gujrat, Multan, Sialkot, Sargodha, Gurdaspur, Hoshiarpur, Kapurthala, Kangra, Bahawalpur, Chamba and in few parts of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and in few areas of Jammu & Kashmir also like – Jammu, Akhnoor, Samba and Kathua, Poonch, Rajouri and Muzaffarabad etc.

### **Lobana Community: Its naming and social background:**

This question has always been a challenging one as to how and when the word “Lobana” came into being. There are many logical beliefs and some without any logic. Some peoples are of the view that Sri Ram Chandra’s son ‘Luv’ was their great ancestor from whom the ancestry of Lobanas began. According to another view, the word Lobana is used for a brave and warrior community the members of which used to wear iron dress. But both the beliefs are not logical because there is no clear evidence of their owing their origin to Rama’s son Luv and the second belief falls through because in battle field, many soldiers in the world had their iron body covers. Here the third belief appears to be more logical according to which Lobana is a combination of two words ‘Salt’ and ‘Business’. This word comes from Sanskrit word – Lavan, which means one dealing in salt.<sup>1</sup> Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha has also define this word linking it with a particular caste, which deal in salt at some period of time. According to him, “Lobana, is a particular caste, which was given this name as they sold salt in villages. The Lobanas went about their business with their oxen laden with merchandise and their leaders were called “Nayak”<sup>2</sup>. They got their salt from the Kangra hill mines and carried it on their oxen to other



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regions for trade and most people bought their salt from them.<sup>3</sup> Their main profession was dealing in and transportation of salt. A British officer, **George Armand Furse**, in India has pointed towards this in his book “Studies on Military Transport” that the “Lobana castes of Sikhs possess in a high degree the useful knowledge of the lading and care of beasts of burden. In olden days the people of the Lobana caste were the carriers of the country.”<sup>4</sup> Because of these dependable means of transport, most of the Khatri and Arora businessmen depended on Lobanas for transportation of their merchandise.<sup>5</sup> In fact Lobanas owe their origin to Banjaras, who have five main branches: Turkiya Banjara, Baid Banjara, Lobana Banjara, Mukeri Banjara and Behroop Banjara. Lobana Banjara have eleven major Gotras – and they call themselves are descendants of Gaur Brahmins <sup>6</sup>. There is another belief about them that they owe their origin to Rajputs but later on when profession was linked to community, they were placed in the third caste according to the caste system. Grierson view in this regard is worthy of attention in support of this: “Many words of Lobanki dialect resemble the language of the western Rajputs and the Lobana traders of the south also claim that their ancestors were Rajputs”<sup>7</sup>. The Lobanas of Ludhiana and Jhang Districts also believed that they were the descendants of the Rajputs of Jaipur and Jodhpur.<sup>8</sup> Giani Girja Singh also links Lobanas with Chandravanshi Kashtriyas<sup>9</sup>. They are known by different names in different parts of the Punjab, like, Lubana, Lobana, Labana etc.<sup>10</sup>

### The Sikh faith and the Lobana Community

The Lobana community enjoys a special and respectable place in the Sikh history. Even in the initial period of the Sikh faith, the members of this community had embraced the Sikh faith. The first leading Sikh of this community was Bhai Mansukh, who had come to Sultan Pur Lodhi from Lahore and embraced the Sikh faith. “It is believed that he went to Sri Lanka on a business trip and he preached the Sikh faith there. It was through his inspiration that the king of Sri Lanka, Shivnabh became a follower of Guru Nanak.”<sup>11</sup> In the year 1539 C.E. Guru Nanak Dev nominated Guru Angad Dev Ji as his successor. At that time the Lobana devotees led by Saundey Shah came to pay obeisance to Guru Angad Dev Ji. “They carried on their bullock carts wheat, rice, jiggery, millet, maida, ghee, flour and reached Khadoor Sahib with utmost devotion.”<sup>12</sup>

During the time of Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan Dev Ji, there was a huge increase in the number of members of the Lobana community. The leading Sikh amongst them during the time of Guru Arjan Dev was ‘Baba Hassna’. He carried out the transportation work for the requirements of the Guru’s house. He brought provisions for Guru’s Langar (community kitchen). Similarly, during Guru Har Gobind’s time, Baba Takhat Mal was the leading Sikh in Guru’s attendance. “Baba Takhat Mal came in contact with Guru Har Gobind Sahib at Bajurgwal (District Gujarat) when Guru Ji was going to visit Kashmir.”<sup>13</sup> Although the Lobana community had embraced the Sikh faith in Guru Nanak’s time, the greater fame of the community came about during the time of the last two Gurus because of their praiseworthy services. According to Sikh annals “Bhai Makhan Shah Lobana was the Sikh who had recognized Guru Tegh Bahadur as successor to Sri Guru Har Krishan.”<sup>14</sup> During Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji’s time as Ninth Guru, Makhan Shah played a very important role for propagation of



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the Sikh faith. “He also acted against Guru’s opponent Dhir Mal.”<sup>15</sup> Lakhi Shah Lobana is remembered in Sikh history with great respect. He was a very rich trader. He owned four villages of Delhi – Malcha, Raisina, Barakhamba and Narela. His grandfather, Nayak Thakur, was considered a leading contractor during Akbar’s time. He had been awarded the contract for construction of Red Fort. Lakhi Shah had cordial relations with the Mughals but after Guru Tegh Bahadur’s martyrdom, conditions changed because “Lakhi Shah had cremated Guru Tegh Bahadur’s torso by setting fire to his house.”<sup>16</sup> He had eight sons, seventeen grandsons and twenty four great grandsons. All of them attained martyrdom during struggle against the Mughals. Bhai Mani Singh was Lakhi Shah’s son-in-law who was martyred by severing every limb from his body. During Guru Gobind Singh’s time, the members of this community joined the Guru’s army and trained as armed soldiers. They took very active part in the battles fought by Guru Ji and fought valiantly. Lakhi Shah’s son, Hem Singh, attained martyrdom in the second battle of Anandpur Sahib. When Guru Gobind Singh left the Anandpur fort on 21<sup>st</sup> December 1704, the Lobana Sikhs put all the belongings of Guru’s household on their carts. Similarly, in 1705, in the Chamkaur fortress, fighting the Mughal forces, of the forty Singh’s one Bhai Jawand Singh son of Makhana Shah, also attained martyrdom. Besides fighting for Guru Gobind Singh, the Lobanas, helped Baba Banda Singh Bahadur also. People joined Banda Singh Bahadur’s army in large numbers along with Lobana Sikhs and fought battles valiantly. Among them were, Koer Singh, Baaj Singh, and Bhagwant Singh who held important positions in the army of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur. Baaj Singh was martyred along with Banda Singh Bahadur. The Lobanas played an important role too during the Sikh Misl rule. They mainly served the Bhangi, Ramgarhia, Shahidan and Ahluwalia Misls (confederacies). They enrolled themselves in the Sikh Army during Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s reign, and proved them as very good soldiers by showing their bravery. Lobana Sardar, Dona Singh held a very high position in the Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s Army. Recognizing their valor and martial spirit, Maharaja Ranjit Singh awarded them landing estates in Gujranwala and Multan.

Wherever the Lobanas settled, they named their villages as Tanda. This word Tanda is changed form of Dhanda, a word of Lobani dialect, which means a place for the caravans for short stay. Later on their major villages had established permanently in these place of caravans. “In Kangra the Labanas hold four hamlets, each called Tanda.”<sup>17</sup> The decline of the Mughal rule and foreign invasions forced them to settle permanently and left their usual nomadic life.<sup>18</sup> Right from the middle of the nineteenth century, their population has constituted the entire villages. There are some clusters of their villages also at many places. During the Sikh rule, they settled in the plains of the Punjab and semi-hilly regions. Because of settling permanently, they began the process of bringing social, economic and political change in them. Those days, besides the Punjab, Lobana community has settled in many other states of India. Outside Punjab, such states are Haryana and Delhi and then the state of Jammu and Kashmir where a large number of peoples of Lobana community were settled and their position is quite satisfactory from socio-economic angle.



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## Lobana Sikh community in Jammu and Kashmir.

During the present time after Punjab, Haryana and Delhi, Jammu & Kashmir is a region where large number of people connected with the Lobana community lives. Although in the pre-independence census reports, the number of Lobana's was not large, after independence there has been a continuous increase in the number of these people, like that in the case of those belonging to other faiths. "According to 1891 Census Report, the total number of Lobana's in the State is 5117 out of which Hindu Lobana's number is 5077, Sikh Lobanas-32 and Muslim Lobana's are 8."<sup>19</sup> But afterwards, when the Hindu Lobana's embraced the Sikh faith, there was a tremendous increase in the population of Sikh Lobana's while the number of Muslim Lobana's continued to decrease and disappeared in the subsequent census reports. In the state of Jammu and Kashmir of today, there are many villages which are predominantly inhabited by Sikh Lobana's:

### The leading Gotras of Sikh Lobana's in Jammu & Kashmir.

Dr. Jaswant Singh, talking of the social structure in detail in his research work has classified the Gotras and sobriquets (*all*). He regards the Lobana community divided into eleven gotras, like Kundals, Sandals, Bharot, Bashak, Kaushal, Kolachh, Laslas, Kachhap, Vashishath, Bishpal and Atrelas."<sup>20</sup> Out of these, leaving aside Kundlas and Sandals other gotras are small in number. The Kundlas have 29 sobriquets out of which, Daatley, Baghiaaney, Multani, Barwal, Gaahray, Kaakniya, Narsighia and Manesi are most known sobriquets. The Sandlas have 29 sobriquets but only Ajrots or Ghotras and Matianaa are the leading ones. Out of eight sobriquets of Bharot gotra, Dharimians, Manihanis, out of eight Bashak gotra's sobriquet, Khaasria, out of Kaushal Gotra's four, Mathon, Mallayi and Adhmoondia, out of six of Laslas gotra, Palias and Makhanshahi and Raja, out of six sobriquets of Vashishath gotra, Chohannay or Chaniana are the leading ones.

Those belonging to these sobriquets are found in the J&K State in Districts Jammu Samba, Kathua and some villages of Poonch & Rajouri. For example, The R. S. Pura tehsil of Jammu District (in village Kotli Arjun Singh, Dharimians, Ajrots and Datley, in village Kotli Shah Daula and Kirpind, Multani and Chanianai, in village Kadiyal, Gaahray and Rajay, in Badila and Khour, Maniyani, in village Dablehar, Rapial, Paliya and Narsinghia, in village Mamka, Chinianna and Paliya, in Khour and Bhau, Maniyani, Chanianai and Rapyal,

In the villages of tehsil Bishnah of Jammu district, Makhanpur has Mathon and Adhmoondiay, in villages near Akhnoor, Tanda, Sohal, Sungal, Baala, Jadd, Devipur, Sibliwala, Diaran, etc. has Daatlay, Maliyai, Taankiya and Rapial, in villages of District Samba, Raika, Rarra, Rarrian, Jhang, there are Rapial, Mathon, Gujjar, Kalsaani, etc. belonging to sobriquets connected with Lobana community. Of these, Ajrot or Ghotra gotra is the most leading one and found in almost all villages connected with Lobana's. Three interesting aspects come to the fore while collecting information about this community. Most of the people in this community prefer



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to use their sobriquets rather than their Gotra. The present generation even does not know about their Gotra. They know only the sobriquets. Some people go back to their ancestry connected with historical and mythological personages. Just as it is believed that all those connected with Ajraut gotra were descendants of Ajjū, grandfather of Sri Ram Chandra. Thirdly, the interesting aspect of this community is that they are not found in any other faith or community.

**Leading villages of Lobana’s in Jammu & Kashmir:**

The Partition of 1947 gave birth to too many socio-cultural serious calamities which generally affected the Indian psyche, but particularly Punjabi mind. In the killings and loot during the Partition, many people suffered loss of life and property. Lobana community also could not remain unaffected by this calamity. Most of the members of the Lobana community migrated from Pakistani Punjab and settled in Indian Punjab and many parts of Jammu and Kashmir. Those from the present Sialkot and canal colonies and many villages near Lahore settled down in Jammu & Kashmir. There were many big villages in Sialkot like Kundan Pur, Garhi, Raja, Nangal Shahu and Channi belonging to Lobana Sikhs who migrated and settled down in Jammu and Punjab. But it is not so that the Lobana Sikhs came to Jammu and Kashmir only after partition. In fact Lobana community had arrived in Jammu & Kashmir even in ancient times and they were not only limited to Jammu region but also had many villages in Muzaffarabad area of Kashmir also. “To start with, most of the inhabitants were Sehaj dhari Sikhs & devotees of the Gurus. But with the propagation of Gurmat (Sikh tenets) they had not only embraced the Sikh faith but also during the tribal raids of 1947 they attained martyrdom adhering to the Sikh faith till their last breath.<sup>21</sup> There is another proof of existence of Lobana community in Kashmir that Baba Makhan Shah Lobana was born and brought up in village Tanda. Besides Tanda, Gali Seri, Chudhakhian, Botha, Khanda, etc. were such leading villages where most of the residents were Lobana Sikhs & followers of Makhan Shah Lobana. <sup>22</sup> After the turmoil of 1947, like the Sikhs of other communities, the Lobana Sikhs also got settled permanently in Jammu, Punjab and Himachal. Many Muzaffarabadi Lobanas settled permanently in villages Barnoti and Raj Bagh near Kathua of Jammu Province, The details below are indicative of the villages connected with the Lobana community in different districts of Jammu & Kashmir: -

**District : Jammu, Tehsil: R.S. Pura.**

Badila	Kirpind	Biaspur
Kadiyal	Mamka	Parlah
Kotli Arjun Singh	Khour	Kalyana
Kotli Shah Doula	Bhau	Diwan Garh
Tanda	Chak Mohd. Yaar	Pindi Sarocha
Bagga Channa	Dablehar	R.S. Pura (town)

**District: Jammu, Tehsil: Bishnah**

Makhanpur Charakaan	Mangaal
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**District: Jammu, Tehsil: Akhnoor**

Tanda	Bala	Sohal
Sungal	Jadd	Devi Pur
Simbli Wala	Diyaran	Wataira

**District: Jammu, Tehsil, Jammu (Rural and urban areas)**

Ekta Bihar	Sanjay Nagar	Preet Nagar
Nanak Nagar	Green Avenue. (Digiana)	Channi Himat
Sainik colony	Santokh Vihar, Kalu Chak	Jungwari* Mishriwala*

\*Jungwari & Mishriwala is situated at Jamu-Akhnoor Road and is the only villages. All the other areas are urbanized.

**District: Rajouri**

Thanda Pani Kangri Talla Tanda Bihani Wala Marchola

**Distict: Riyasi**

Khaira Lair Gajor

**District Samba, The.Vijapur and Samba:**

Jhang	Kaulpur	Nanga	Tanda
Raara	Pakhari	Sujma	Chak Kaushal Singh
Raika	Khanpur	Burj	Pangdoor
Bariyaan Nadala	Sartiyaan	Rajpura.	

**District Kathua:**

Khanwaal	Marajpura	Biru Chak
Kundey Chak	Kookay Chak	Bagaria Tanda

**Lobana community of Jammu-Kashmir:**

**Economic condition-** The economic condition of a particular section of society depends on the professions it is engaged in. This ongoing process is not only the means of earning a living; it also determines the social status of a person or a group of persons. Because of its dynamism, changes continue to take place in professions and no one remained untouched by this. Through



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this ongoing process, the Lobana community of Jammu & Kashmir also had been trying to safeguard its social condition. Up to the initial stage of the British rule, the main profession of this community in Jammu-Kashmir had been considered the transport business. “According to the 1891 Census report, Lobana community has been shown as that engaged in transport business.”<sup>23</sup> But later on, the members of this community gave up their traditional profession and took to farming. Even today also the main profession of Lobana Community is farming. Land has been determining the economic and social status of the Lobana’s of Jammu-Kashmir. But being connected with the farming, the community was not very affluent economically and socially or resourceful in the real sense. Because of social and economic backwardness, the community has included in OBC (Other backward classes). Almost all the Lobana Sikhs living in the villages of Jammu province, still grow wheat and rice traditionally and also vegetables and green fodder and rear cows and buffalos which yield milk, sufficient for both domestic use and for sale in the market. Because of unawareness about general development, up to the seventh decade of the twentieth century, this community has lagged behind educationally also, although during this period, some conscious Sikhs went in for higher studies and occupied the higher posts. Being an extremely determined and hardworking community, it has made unprecedented progress in education. In the academic field, engineering, medicine and law, they received higher education and reached the higher positions in both government and non-government sectors. Because of their valiant background, the members of this community had been leaning more towards army and police jobs. Of the different communities of Jammu & Kashmir, the Lobana community predominate the military institutions. Because of their martial disposition, the members of the community, earlier in the British Army and then in the Indian army have rendered matchless services. Param vir Chakra winner Bana Singh belonged to a Jammu village, Kadiyal and he is a Lobana Sikh, who, by dint of his bravery and courage, during Operation Rajiv, captured a Pakistani post set up at top in Siachin Glacier and even today it is called Bana Singh Post. During the battles of 1962, 1965, 1971 and Kargil war of 1999, many soldiers of Indian army belong to Lobana Sikh community of Jammu and Kashmir region attained martyrdom because of their courage and valor, and did honor to themselves and their community. Many of entry gates of the villages of Jammu have been built to commemorate to Martyrdoms of these Martyrs. Besides farming and serving in the army, the Lobana’s have been engaged in the transport business also, plying buses and trucks. There was a time when Jammu-R.S. Pura, Jammu- Kathua and Jammu-Banihal routes had most of the buses belonging to Lobanas but with the losses having started and spread of education, the present generation tends to turn disinterested in this vocation and more inclined towards government and non-government jobs. Imitating the people of Punjab, the Lobana community of J&K too have of late become more interested in going abroad as a result of which a large number of people of this community have gone abroad. Up to the last decade of the twentieth century, like the Punjabis, had gone illegally to foreign countries and then got settled there permanently. But from the first decade of the twenty first century, many young men, after passing ILET, and went abroad for higher education as students and then settled there. There are many villages in Jammu and Kashmir



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from where Lobanas from almost every household have gone abroad to Europe, Australia, America, Canada, U.K., etc. Because of going abroad and settling there, a qualitative and speedy change is coming in their standard of living and affluence.

### **Woman's social position in Lobana community.**

As regards woman's position in society, here also it is like that of Indian Punjabi women. Because of dominance of man on the economic resources, the family social position of woman in Lobana community is that of subordination to man. Till some decades back, most of the women were denied educational facilities. They kept busy in the household chores only while men took important decisions of the household where, not to speak of acceptance by woman, she was not even consultation was not considered necessary. Even important decisions like those of marriages, etc. were taken by men only. But in today's modern age, girls of the community are receiving education whereby the possibility of their better future and social equality has increased.

### **Lobana community of Jammu-Kashmir: Political position.**

Most of the Lobana's live in Jammu and Samba areas of Jammu-Kashmir. Politically, the community is allied with different political parties but, like other Sikh communities, they have been facing disappointment. Firstly, Jammu being a predominantly Hindu province, and secondly not being in a majority in any election constituency, most of the political parties, does not prefer fielding them as candidates – MLA or MP - for fear of defeat. Of course their votes do affect the victory or defeat of other candidates. Therefore some parties have given them political representation to win them over to their side. There have been some personages in the community, who had been quite well known in political circles. Of this village, Kotli Arjun Singh of tehsil R. S. Pura, Capt. Sunder Singh was a member of the Praja Sabha established by Maharaja Hari Singh in year 1945. Another Lobana leader S. Piara Singh of village Bhou was an activist of National Conference and was elected as MLC in 1963. Smt. Iqbal Kaur of Gandhi Nagar, Jammu, is a personage connected with the community and had been an MLC in the Legislative Assembly. Lobana Sikhs have played an effective role in the Sikh politics of the State. Many were represented in the elected committee/bodies of District level Gurdwara and appointed to important position thereof in the management. Both the sitting Presidents District Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee of District Jammu S. Jagjit Singh and District Samba S. Kulvinder Singh, are connected with Lobana community. Today Lobanas enjoy complete predominance in the Panchayats of Lobana villages and areas.

### **Main religious rituals and beliefs of Lobana community:**

For different social groups, there are many religious beliefs and rituals. In fact, it is religion which provides basis to rituals and customs. Rituals maintain a social balance with such conduct as need religious recognition. It is for the reason that if one defies a code, he is considered to have defied God's Will. Therefore religious beliefs and rituals not only affect the



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behavior of individuals, groups and society, but direct the ongoing conduct. In so far as the Lobana rituals and customs of Jammu Kashmir are concerned, after adopting the Sikh they have even today blind faith of many kinds, rites and rituals, customs and usages. Many members of Lobana community even today worship goddess and ancestors. Even today the first milk yielded by a cow or buffalo is offered at different places and girls (Kanjak) and ancestors are worshiped. New wheat or rice are not used in the house until Puris (fried chapattis) and rice dish are offered at these places. Similarly milk is forbidden till curd, kheer and ghee, etc. is not offered at these places. The belief behind it is that if this is not done, that time both the crop and the cattle can suffer loss or fall ill. There are many beliefs in regard to Sangrand (the 1st day of the solar month) and Amaavas (the last day of the lunar month). Religious deeds are preferred to on these days. Bathing at and pilgrimage of these places is very common among the Lobanas and have great significance. The Amaavas of Bhadon month is very important and many people go to Darbar Sahib Amritsar on this day. On Tuesday and Thursday, most people of this community avoid partaking of meat. This community has accepted the influence of Dogra culture also because of which during Navratas, the girls of the community hold Mata's vigil at home and Rarra sowing (of barley in a small pot) has been in vogue. The tradition of sacrificing a goat at the time of the birth of a son, his marriage and other important ceremonies is going on even today. This sacrifice is made either at the Dehri or Dehri (small Temples) of Sati's at the places of family gods. Some people sacrifice a goat on fulfillment of their desires, at the place dedicated to Bhair Devta near Nagrota village and place of Raja Mandlik at Raika near Vijay Pur, Samba. The goat meat after sacrifice is cooked as food and partaken of sitting there only. Bringing home sacrificial meat is forbidden. Some people hold annual gatherings at these places. There was a time when the members of this community indulged in magical spells also and ghost worship. That is why most people wear round their necks or upper arms some amulets. But with the spread of education as also preaching's of the Sikh faith, this practice has almost come to an end. Some rituals of the above are still performed but because of spread of education and Sikh tenets, the younger generation is gradually refusing to follow them. Some religious institutions of Lobana Sikhs have played an important role in this direction. The members of this community have been greatly influenced by the preaching's of holy men of different places in the Punjab, like Sant Baba Prem Singh Murala, Begowal (Kapurthala) and Dera Nangali Sahib in Jammu-Poonch in regard to blind faith and other rituals which have had their time. Lobanas of Jammu and Kashmir have their own Socio-religious institution – All J&K Lobana Samaj Sudhar Sabha, which is registered and its main office is located in Central Gurdwara, R.S. Pura. This institution is engaged in preaching among the community and to deal with main problems of the community and taking decisions and steps for the betterment of the community. For achieving this end, the annual fair of the community is held in the month of Baisakhi wherein after the conclusion of Akhand Path, exchange of views takes place for the betterment of the community and Baptism is also arranged (Amritpan). Every year a day dedicated to the coronation of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Ninth Guru is observed as Guru Laadho Rey day. It is observed annually at R.S. Pura, Samba and Akhnoor respectively. Besides in every village there is a Sikh Naujawan Sabha (houth league) which remains continuously engaged in religious and social activities. There is hardly any village of Lobana Community and Jammu-Kashmir, where there is no beautiful Gurdwara building. Every Gurupurab is celebrated in these



Gurdwara in the form of Kirtan (devotional singing by lading singers) with utmost devotion and faith. These beautiful Gurdwara buildings peak of the great devotion of the Lobana community.

### Cultural side of the Jammu-Lobana community:

#### \*Language:

The language of the Lobana community is Lobani which is very closely related with Rajasthani. Marwari and Gojri and it remained in use for a very long time but with the change of time and the contact with other languages, its effect went on decreasing and ultimately came to an end. In the Jammu-Kashmir Lobana Sikh community, local Punjabi dialect is in use. In the R S Pura villages, Majhi, Samba and Akhnoor, Punjabi with Dogri influence is spoken now by the Lobana Sikhs. Some important words collected by G.A. Grierson are as under:

Standard Punjabi	-	Lobanki
• Mera	-	Mharo
• Tera	-	Tharo or Thawer
• Tuhada	-	Thuario
• Chann	-	Chand
• Pita	-	Bapu or Baap
• Ghoda	-	Ghodo
• Tara (star)	-	Taro

#### \*Dress:

As regards dress, most of the Lobanas had a loose dress, which included loose wrap round the waist and long Kurta (shirt) mostly. Men kept a wrap on their shoulders also. Women wore blouses of shining embroidery and richly decorated blouse. This dress of women had disappeared long ago. Now Salwar-Kameez is mostly worn. The elderly men still wear wrap around the waist and carry a wrap on the shoulder but the men and women of the present generation of Lobana community prefer the modern dress only. There are no hard and fast rules as regards dress now but still very gaudy dresses is not considered very good. There was a time when women veiled their faces and even today a daughter-in-law veils her face in front of the father-in-law or her husband's elder brother but, unlike in the past, it is not necessary and if there is something left of this custom, it is so only in some backward areas. Most of the people have given up this tradition. Women used to wear gold, silver and ivory ornaments on special occasions and this continues even today, with the only difference that the use of old type jewelry is decreasing, like that of Bazooband (armband) Gokhroo, Kaintha, Tweetriyaan, Panjewan (anklets) etc.

#### \*Fairs and festivals:



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The Lobana Sikhs of Jammu-Kashmir celebrate all the festivals connected with the Sikh faith but they observe special cultural festivities also, like Lohdi, Vaisakhi, Holi and Diwali. There is a big Vaisakhi fair in village Kirpind. Similarly, in village Kotli Arjun Singh there is a Chinj and fair in the month of June. In another village Makhanpur Charakaan, every year there is a gathering at the Mazaar of Naanga Pir and Chinj (wrestling bouts) which is very popular and people come from far off places.

#### **\*Ceremonies connected with child-birth:**

Only a few rites are performed by the Lobanas in the State. After eight month of pregnancy the old custom of sending of Panjiri (Four fried with ghee-dried ginger powder) and some garments is being followed even today. Almonds, dried coconut, dried date, ginger powder, raisins, gram flour, etc. are all pounded and fried in clarified butter (ghee). It is considered very useful diet for the pregnant woman. After the birth, the ritual of *Gurhti* (Honey or raw sugar given to the new born) was also in vogue. The Gurhti given to the child was believed to have a great impact on its mind. Sometimes women made up their mind even before the birth of the child as to who would give it Gurhti. They are desirous of their child having the same traits at the Gurhti giver has. Gurhti is given of jiggery, lump sugar or goat's milk. The mother did not suckle her child till Gurhti was given. But today, in consultation with the doctors, this ritual has almost on the verge of coming to an end. Even today, five days after the childbirth, there is a ritual of *fifth-day bathing*. On the fifth day, the mother mixes neem, fenugreek, etc. and boils in water with which they take bath. This fifth-day bathing used to be got done by the midwife but now the women take this bath themselves. The naming ceremony of the new born is performed in the Gurdwara by the Lobanas. On any day, after the Ardaas (congregational prayer) the first letter of the hymn read out by the priest is taken as the first letter of the name. The maternal side even today make an offer of gifts on the occasion whereby garments for their daughter, her child and the members of her in-law's family and if possible, some ornament also. Earlier community lunch was arranged and celebrates the birth of a son. Now this ritual is gradually disappearing or remains in name only. Lohri (Mid-January) festival was also celebrated by distributing popcorns, sugar bubbles and dried dates among those who come to offer congratulations. This continues even today. But the other side of this aspect is that most of the birth ceremonies are connected with a son's birth compared to a daughter's birth.

#### **\*Ceremonies connected with marriage:**

Marriage is a socio-cultural institution which gives social approval to man-woman sex satisfaction also. Marriage, fulfilling the human being's biological, psychological, spiritual and moral needs, also determines the cultural, social and economic rights also and also fixes the human responsibility. Through this institution only, one, bound by relationships like those of mother, father, daughter-sister, brother, son, etc. and accords respectability in the social order. Marriage ceremony is very essential for one's socialization. The marriages of the Lobanas of Jammu-Kashmir are more or less like those of the Punjabi marriages. In this community



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marriage is a prolonged, detailed and subtle process. Right from Roka or Thaka upto the entry into the kitchen by the girl, there are many small or large scale ceremonies where by marriage is socially established. Besides ordinary marriage, there are Watta, Karewa and Chadar marriages accepted socially. The following rituals are performed mainly by the Lobana community.

### **Selection of the groom (Thaka and kudmayee.)**

The most important work in marriage is the selection of the groom. This is the most difficult one because finding a suitable match for the girl-boy, establishing of family ties, etc. are very important aspects which is kept in view while deciding a matrimonial alliance. Inter-caste, same gotra or sobriquet marriages are forbidden among the Lobanas. While deciding upon the alliance, beauty of the girl and the boy's property are mainly kept in view. Mediator plays an important role in this regard. Thaka and betrothal are almost the same type of ceremonies. The boys family goes to the girl's family and offer to the girl Shagan with other gifts and paraphernalia. Then during betrothal ceremony dried date is given to the boy along with other gifts. The girl's brother generally puts the date in the boy's mouth and the girl's father puts a Rupee of Shagun on the boy's hand and puts dry fruit in the scarf kept in his lap. Meanwhile the boy's family visits the girl's house and performs the Chunni ceremony. With these ceremonies the alliance is determined.

### **Sending of *Teohar* before marriage**

These days it has become customary to send Teohar (Festival) before marriage. In the Saavan (Monsoon) month. The In-laws send Teohar (sweets, fruit, girl's dresses, ornaments, etc. for the girl)

### **Communicating the date of marriage**

Ordinarily there is no special consideration for fixing a date for marriage, but marriages are avoided during Shraadh and the month of Poh. Earlier, The families used to get a marriage date from the Granthi of the Gurdwara but today not much deliberation takes place about this. Of course Sunday or other holiday is preferred. After fixing the date, the important work is the send the letter of marriage date. This is done by the mediator or the barber and even today's this ritual is performed.

### **Making of Wari (Dress)**

It is customary with the Lobana community of Jammu-Kashmir to buy items of Wari, which include dresses for the boy and the girl as also jewelry. Near relatives accompany the family to bury these items. Today it has become a common practice to take the girl to be married along for buying Wari and the girl is able to have the dresses and jewelry of her choice.

### **Invitation to the marriage**



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Near and dear ones are sent word to participate in the marriage ceremony. Earlier in this ritual, Gur (jiggery) and 'Patasay' (sugar bubble). Invitation to marriage was sent through a barber or a water carrier. The relatives gave some money (tips) to the barber or water carrier. This practice is still in vogue with the difference that now, instead of sugar bubbles, fine sweets and dry fruits are sent. With this begins the series of singing in the house of marriage. **Suhaags** (songs of blissful marriage for the girl) and in the boy's house, **Ghodian** are sung. Sometime ago a hand mill was placed in the center of the bevy of girls and women and whole pulses were broke. On a fixed day, seven happily married women get together or women in the family buy all the material and clean and pound or grind it. Songs of joy are sung on the occasion.

### **Maiyai Paina, Mehendi, Watna and Choorra (Bangle ceremony)**

A boy or girl are forbidden from stirring out of the house a few days before marriage. They are also not left alone in the house. Friends of the boy keep company and the girls sit with the girl. This ritual is called *maiyai paina*. The idea behind this ritual was to safeguard the girl or the boy to be married from any bad spell being cast on her or him. This ritual used to be observed in the Lobana community with all the care and vigil but now it has remained in name only. On the marriage eve, the relatives and friends sat together for contributing Neondra, a customary cash contribution, which was paid by making some addition to the one received by the relative. In the J&K Lobana community, heavy amount is paid along with costly gifts. After paying Neondra the Mehendi (henna) ceremony is performed whereby the girl or boy's hands (palms and fingers) are hennaed. Henna is mixed with water and paste is applied while singing songs of joy. Before applying henna, five virgin girls massage oil in the boy's or girl's head with their little fingers. On the marriage day, the **bathing** ceremony is performed. At this time, boy and girl are anointed where after the maternal uncle gives him or her cash gift and helps him or her sit on the wide low stool. Two decades before today, the barber or his wife used to bathe the boy or girl. While anointing many rituals were performed. But now there is a decline in these rituals. The maternal uncle gets Choorra (ivory bangles) for the girl to be married. These days henna exercise is increasingly done at the beauty parlours and the songs sung on the occasion are being forgotten.

### **Sehra tying, collyrium and riding he mare**

Tying of Sehra (laurel) ceremony is very important. putting collyrium in the eyes. The bridegroom's sister ties the laurel on the bridegroom's head and the sisters-in-law (brothers' wives) put the collyrium in the eyes of the younger brother of their husband. The bridegroom gifts them cash in return. Similarly mounting the mare ceremony is very important. At the time of dismounting, the boy gives cash gift to his sisters for holding the reins and then the marriage party is given a sendoff. In the Lobana community, before the departure of marriage party, they go to the Gurdwara for obeisance. Some people go to the places dedicated to the family gods or Sati's for obeisance. When the marriage party reaches the bride's place, the ceremony of Milni (introductory meet) is performed. This ceremony is performed on the arrival of the marriage



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party at the bride's place. The relatives of the bride formally meet the relatives of the bridegroom and offer cash or other gifts. In the Lobana community of J&K, after Milni, tea and refreshments are served with numerous delicacies.

### **Anand Karaj, Doli and Pani Varna:**

Anand Karaj (the marriage ceremony) is very important. In this ceremony, four Lavaan (Circumambulation around the Holy Book of Sikhs Guru Granth Sahib) are performed in the presence of the sides, the bride's and the bridegroom's. The bride's father hands the boy a corner of the bride's scarf and circumambulations take place. After circumambulations, the bride and the bridegroom are exhorted to lead a good moral life as a couple. After the marriage ceremony, the marriage party is invited to have breakfast or lunch, as the time may be. Generally in the Lobana families non-veg food is served in the State. Of course here has been qualitative reform in not taking wine in marriage. At the time of Doli (sending off the bride in the Palanquin) in the afternoon, the girl again sits up for make-up and wearing of jewelry. Before the sending off the marriage party the dowry and other items are displayed for the benefit of kinsmen, marriage party and other guests. Everything gifted to the daughter by her parents is shown here. The marriage party leaves after having a look at the dowry displayed but the bridegroom and his best man (sarbhala) keep sitting. The milk ceremony is performed here when the sisters-in-law of the bridegroom (bride's sisters) make the bridegroom drink milk and the bridegroom distributes a gold or silver ring to his sister-in-law and very light rings to other girl friends of bride sitting there. The bridegroom's mother-in-law gives auspicious gift (in cash) and sweetens his mouth and then the bride is given a sendoff. After marriage water waving ceremony around the heads of the bride and bridegroom and after some days the bride is ushered in the kitchen ceremoniously. Among the Lobana Sikhs, the girl drops her parent's gotra suffixed to her name and takes to her husband's gotra. Today the Lobana marriages are not performed in the villages but in marriage palaces. The practice of offering and accepting dowry has been there from the very beginning. Because of giving very costly cars and other gifts, the Lobana marriages have become very expensive.

### **Rite and practices connected with death:**

After discussing about the birth and marriage ceremonies, it is necessary to talk about rites connected with death. After a person breathes his last, the dead body is kept on the floor. Women begin to wail in the house and men sit down outside on a thick sheet or carpet. All of them praise the good qualities of the departed soul. Last bath is given to the dead. The elderly, of middle age and married women wear simple dress but if the deceased was an unmarried woman or man, he or she is dressed in marriage attire. There is the custom of going round the dead from right to left and bowing. While going to the cremation ground, only near relatives of the deceased carry the bier on their shoulders. In the cremation ground, before arranging the wood, ghee is poured in the deceased's mouth and then *Ardaas* is performed and the fire is lit. Ashes are collected on the third day after death. After this the cremation spot is cleaned and splashed



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with dung and a special kind of idol is made with dough and at every corner of it, nails are driven and thread is twined from nail to nail in the. After that small chapattis of flour are placed over which are placed whole boiled wheat grains. And in the center a lamp is lit. This is done in lieu of the share of the deceased. After the death of unmarried male or female, ashes are collected immediately and carried for immersion in a river. It is to ensure that no tantric takes away the ashes for magic spells, etc. Earlier it was done at Kiratpur Sahib (Punjab), but these days it is done at Aknoor also in the river Chenab. On the fourth day of the death of the man or the woman, ritual of *chautha* is performed by the paternal or the in-law's family. The family and those closely related go to a religious place to bathe from head to toe and pay obeisance. Community kitchen is also arranged on the occasion. Among the Lobana Sikhs, on the seventh day after death, Akhand Path (Uninterrupted reading of the Holy Book) is begun and the last prayers are held on the tenth day. At the end, the family of the deceased go to the in-law's or parent's place of the deceased for the return mourning visit. Relatives keep coming in numbers for mourning from near and distant places. Eleven months after death anniversary is observed and after four year fourth anniversary is observed. Sharadhs are also performed by Lobanas with a little difference or so. Because of the unfair spending on these occasions, some time back, some leading members of the community opposed these rituals but most people continue to perform these.

On the basis of the above discussion, we can say that Lobana community has its own glorious and long history. This community, which had been economically backward, by dint of its very hard work and dedication, has advanced appreciably and crated its own respectable identity.

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